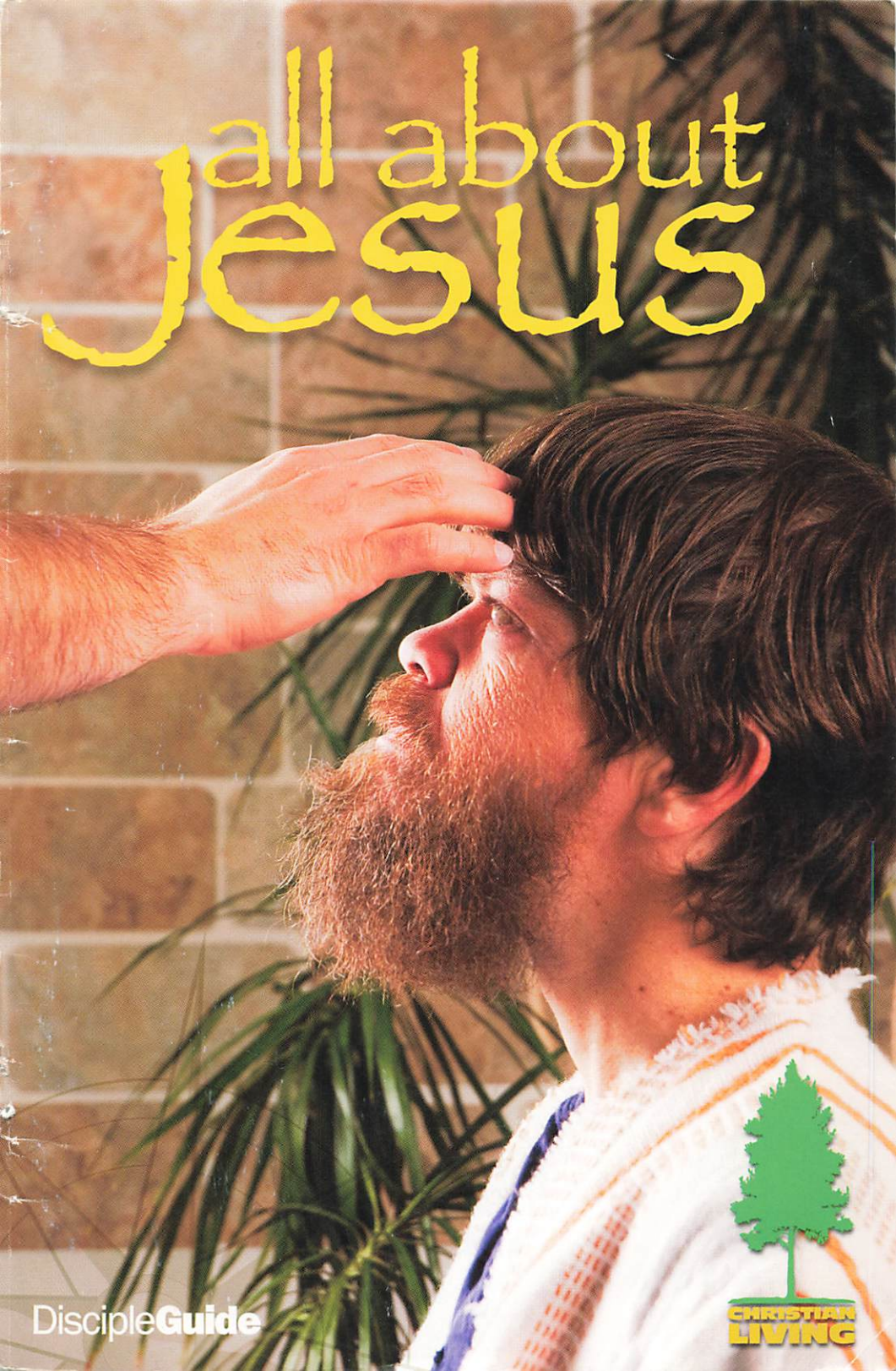
all about Jesus



DiscipleGuide

CHRISTIAN LIVING

all about Jesus

Greg Medenwald
author

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The Christian Living Track of the Christian Growth Ministry

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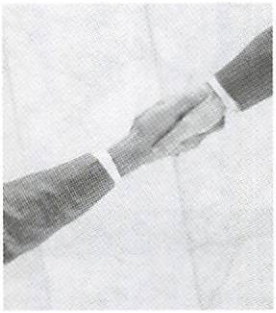
Introduction

Think about your relationship with your best friend. How did your friendship begin? What circumstances changed your relationship from just being an acquaintance into being true friends?



I moved into the men's dormitory at Central Baptist College in the late summer of 1973. As the weeks and months of that freshman year passed I got acquainted with most of the residents, but only became friends with a few. By the third year I was rooming with one of those close friends. In the years to come we were in each other's weddings. After college we didn't live near each other for several years, but we kept up with each other and visited together when we could.

What *made* us friends? We had similar backgrounds, experiences, and interests. We are not alike in personality, but we seem to fit each other. We don't have exactly the same views theologically, but we respect each other's opinions. We spent a lot of time together in college, and later in life our ministries brought us to the same town, and once again we were able to enjoy times of fellowship. We have shared blessings and problems together and drawn encouragement and insight from the other's experiences. Our experiences together have made us good friends.

Isn't that somewhat like our relationship with Jesus? When we did not know Him, He found us and demonstrated that He wanted to be our friend. He made the ultimate sacrifice to become our friend and Savior. Once we accepted Him as Savior, He invited us to get to know Him completely. And we discovered that the more we got to know Him, the better we liked Him as our friend. Time, fellowship, and shared experiences all served to forge our deep friendship and desire to know Him more and do all that we can for Him.

The lessons in this series "All About Jesus" aim to help you get to know more about your Savior. As you study and learn more about the words and actions of your friend Jesus, you should grow in your appreciation and love for the Lord. As a result you should also have a greater desire to serve Him. I hope you will become a better friend of Jesus as you share in the discovery of Jesus through these lessons.

Jerome Cooper, editor

LESSON 1

What About Jesus?

1 Corinthians 2:2

To preach Jesus! That was Paul's goal at Corinth. He also wanted to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4), and to accomplish many other things that would move the Corinthians out of their spiritual babyhood. But to proclaim Jesus was "number one, and that is what he was determined to do according to 1 Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."*

Paul had made up his mind. He had come to a decision. Proclaiming *Jesus,* which means "Savior," *Christ,* which means "Anointed One," and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was without question his most important calling and mission in life. Paul made that clear in 1 Corinthians 2:2, and in other powerful verses as 1 Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,"* and Philippians 1:21, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

First Corinthians 2:2 is not saying that Paul refused to preach about any other aspect of Christianity in Corinth. He was there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), and the content of 1 and 2 Corinthians shows that he taught many other subjects. Surely Paul would have declared *"all the counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27) to the Corinthians just

The Heart of the Lesson

To know about Christ is to appreciate Christ. Hear the story of Christ and be inspired to follow Him.

as he did to the Ephesians. The verse, however, does plainly indicate that Jesus was Paul's focal point, and that all the truth he taught in some way related to Jesus. That is, Jesus was his focus — the object of his undivided attention. It was all about Jesus, and Paul had good reason for this Christ-centered resolve.

His Message Stands Alone!

Though he was accustomed to speaking and had spoken to some very powerful and influential people, Paul used no eloquent forms of speech in Corinth. He offered no clever arguments. He avoided endless debates. He spoke no high-sounding philosophies, which were much beloved by the Greeks. Paul was a brilliant scholar and a highly educated man, but he sounded no intellectual tones in Corinth. He flexed no mental muscles, as can be seen in 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1: *"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God."*

Paul also attempted no self-exaltation in Corinth, as he typically did nothing to draw attention to himself. *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Galatians 6:14).

Paul's message was simple. It was not a message against effective speech or knowledge (1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:14), but a message for Jesus. It was directed more to the heart than to the mind, and it was all about Christ or directly related to Him. The Corinthians needed to hear nothing more. Life was too short for anything else, and the truth about Jesus needed nothing to embellish it.

You, like Paul, have a twofold duty in broadcasting the good news about Jesus to the world. Positively speaking, you have the responsibility and privilege to proactively proclaim Christ with your means, lifestyle, and words. And negatively speaking, you are to do nothing to distract from His message. Therefore it's all right if the world does not think highly of your personal skills and abilities as a messenger, as long as they will hear and think highly of the message — which is Christ! It's also all right if they don't think in terms of the glamour and prestige of your church, as long as they think highly about the Christ of the church. By no means are you to purposefully do a poor job of speaking, or your church do a poor job of ministering. To the contrary, we are always to do our best. But again, people are not the issue. Christ is! He is the One to be exalted, and His message, and all that God sees relating to His message is sufficient. His message stands alone. He is *Jesus*, the Savior. He is *Christ*, the Anointed One. That's enough!

His Person Inspires!

I enjoy history, with honorable mention going to early American history, Civil War history, and church history. In view of that, and in an effort to surround myself with a contemporary *"cloud of witnesses"* (Hebrews 12:1) who inspire me to faith, I have the picture of a number of historic figures on my office wall. I call it my "wall of faith." One picture is of C. H. Spurgeon; his story inspires me to be a better prepared preacher and pastor. D. L. Moody's portrait is on the wall; his story inspires me to be a more passionate preacher. John Wesley is there; his story inspires me to work harder and longer. CSA General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson is on the lower left of the wall; his story encourages me to look the enemy in the face, whoever or whatever that enemy may be. CSA General Robert E. Lee is lower center; his story reminds me of the importance of being a Christian gentleman. And CSA General James Longstreet is lower right; his story compels me to carefully think and pray through the important issues of Christian ministry. Pictures of Bible heroes are not available, or they would be first and foremost on the wall. Again, this is a contemporary wall of faith. But their pictures and stories do truly inspire me. The teaching of Hebrews 12:1 really works. All I have to do is to look at their pictures, and I am immediately motivated to be a better person. Nothing has to be said, just their image will do.

The pictures of Spurgeon, Moody, Wesley, Jackson, Lee, and Longstreet, however, don't have nearly the effect of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! What they have told us about Jesus Christ is absolutely amazing. It's life changing. It's unforgettable. It's inspiring. That's why it's necessary only to preach Jesus. When His story is told, life instantly takes on a new, bold, better, and greater dimension.

His Crucifixion Is Your Redemption!

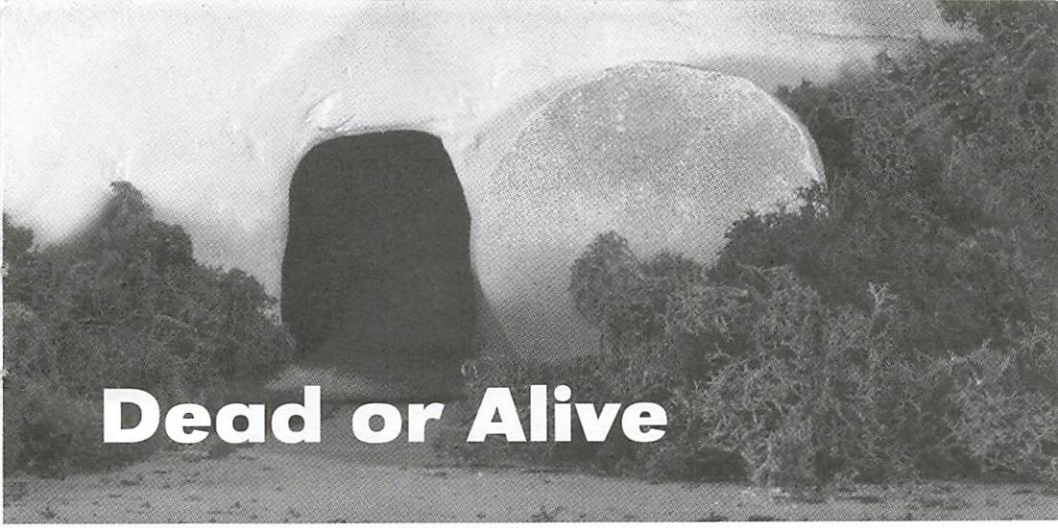
It can't happen without Jesus. That is, no one's sins can be forgiven without His sacrifice. No one can be permitted into the holy and eternal presence of God without the shed blood of Christ covering his sins. That was the heart of *"the testimony of God"* (1 Corinthians 2:1), and Jesus said it in His own words in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

A few weeks after the crucifixion the apostle Peter, while boldly addressing the Sanhedrin, reverberated the truth spoken by Christ in John 14:6, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

So it was very natural, and even essential, for Paul to major on the crucifixion of Christ as he did in the lesson text: *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."*

Paul could have preached about many topics in Corinth, but he knew the Corinthians needed most to hear about how the death of Christ could free them from the penalty and power of sin. So he lost no time. He went immediately to Christ, the cross, and the crucifixion. *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Christianity has a mandate. Not man-given, but God-given! It is to concentrate on Christ and to never lose our concentration. What about Christ? To say the least His message stands alone! His Person inspires! His crucifixion is your redemption! And that's why we will study the life and ministry of Christ in these thirteen weeks. We want to know the details about Jesus. We want to hear His words, see His acts, connect with His motives, and know His feelings. We want to be more familiar with Jesus than we are with anyone else in ancient, modern, or biblical history. It's all about Him. Not just in word is it all about Him, but also in reality and practice. Give yourself to this study. Do some homework. Buy some inspirational books about Jesus. Like Paul, be *determined.* Commit yourself to knowing more about Christ than you do about politicians, television personalities, movie stars, sports heroes, or the typical people in your daily life. The more you learn about Christ, the more you learn about life, the more you find yourself, and the more you see your purpose in life. It's all about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. Say that and mean it!



Dead or Alive

That's not *Dead or Alive* as in an old wanted poster for a criminal like Jesse James. Instead, *Dead or Alive* refers to a decision that all people must make about Jesus. Martha, the sister of Lazarus and Mary, made the decision. It's recorded in John 11:27, *"I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God,"* and she made the choice after Jesus gave this personal testimony. *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"* (John 11:25-26).

At the point that Jesus spoke those words, Lazarus was physically dead. Yet Jesus had some good news! Not only would He raise Lazarus to life in John 11:38-44, but He also had the power to raise all people who believe Him to spiritual and eternal life.

Jesus spoke about the object of belief: *"I am the resurrection, and the life"* (John 11:25). That's not a material object, but "a person ... to whom a specified action or feeling is directed" *(Oxford American Dictionary)*. It's Jesus! He is the personification and source of the resurrection to eternal life.

Jesus spoke about the act of belief: *"He that believeth in me"* (John 11:25). *Believeth* speaks about a mental persuasion, and means to "give credit to." To believe, therefore, is to be fully persuaded that Jesus is the only means to eternal life, and to give Him credit as being your personal Savior.

Jesus spoke about the result of belief: *"Though he were dead* [physically like Lazarus], *yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die* [spiritually or eternally]" (John 11:25-26).

Jesus spoke about the question of belief: *"Believest thou this?"* (John 11:26). Martha did, but what about you? Do you believe? Accept Jesus and you will have life. Reject Jesus and you will have death. *Dead or Alive* isn't just about Jesse James; it's about you and the choice you will make about Jesus!

LESSON 2

Jesus Raising the Dead

Luke 7:11-17; Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:41-43; John 11:11, 35, 38-44

A number of years ago I was attending Dr. W. A. Criswell's School of Prophets. I was a young preacher from a comparatively small church in a small town, and I was overawed by all that I was seeing and hearing. During a break time I was talking to an older gentleman on the steps. As I was departing for the next session I introduced myself to him, and he responded by saying "Well, I'm Pat Zondervan." "Is that Pat Zondervan of Zondervan Publishing Company?" I asked. He said yes, and all I had time to do at that point was to ask him to sign a book of Dr. Criswell's sermons on 1 and 2 Peter which his company published and I had just purchased in the church bookstore. He did, and I went back into the church building wishing that I had done a better job of talking to him. Had I known who he was, I could have gratefully acknowledged his many accomplishments — for Mr. Zondervan and his family had done a great work for God's glory through Christian publishing.

It is good not only for us to know people, but to also be aware of what they have accomplished. That equips us to be better followers, and in time to become better leaders. The more we know about the Lord's victories in a leader's life, the more apt we are to follow him to

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus is the Lord of life. Give yourself to Jesus in all matters of life.

victory, and that is especially true of following Jesus.

Do you know, for example, that Jesus raised at least three people from the dead, and that Luke 7:22 indicates that there might have been more? *"Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."*

Preaching the gospel was the crowning achievement of that verse, and raising the dead helped to reach that end. Yes, restoring people to life is what Jesus could do, and what He did do — indicating that He was truly heaven sent and worthy of the trust placed in Him.

Widow's Son at Nain

Nain was a little Galilean town southeast of Nazareth, and it was the site of the first recorded incident of Jesus raising the dead. The story is recorded only in Luke 7:11-17.

It is interesting to note that the dead boy, whose funeral procession was already underway as Jesus arrived, was the only son of a widow lady and that Jesus had compassion for her. It is also interesting to note that Jesus touched the bier, or coffin, which was against ceremonial law, that the boy at Jesus' word sat up, and that Jesus victoriously delivered him to his mother. Jesus' disciples and many people were following Him at the time, and after witnessing the miracle they (1) were taken by fear, which was a sign of respect for Jesus; (2) glorified God; (3) realized that Jesus was a heaven-sent prophet; and (4) spread the story of what Jesus had done, *"And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about"* (verse 17).

Rumoring about Jesus! We also have that privilege!

Jairus' Daughter

Jairus was a ruler in his local synagogue when his twelve-year-old daughter became ill and died (Luke 8:42). The story is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56. The incident probably took place in the Galilean city of Capernaum, and it ran parallel with the story of Jesus healing the woman who by faith touched the hem of His garment (Matthew 9:21).

Faith in Christ, mixed with respect and worship, is what Jairus expressed toward Christ (Mark 5:22-23). In his moment of horror, grief, and helplessness as his daughter lie dying and then dead, Jairus looked to what he saw as his single source of genuine help. Jesus was his only hope, and Jesus did not let him down as He raised the girl back to life.

The word *sleepeth* (Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:39), *sleep*, or *sleeping* is a scriptural description for the dead (John 11:11-15; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 5:10).

Faith is a key word in the story of the sick woman (Mark 5:34); *believe* (Mark 5:36) is a key word in the story of Jairus and his daughter, and faith and belief are key words in our daily walk with Jesus. Regardless of your story and the present chapter of your life, faith and belief in Christ are always appropriate.

To see how Jesus was so focused that He was unbothered by the rude and skeptical crowd (Matthew 9:24), how He turned the funeral-like atmosphere in the home to one of rejoicing (Matthew 9:23; Mark 5:42), and how He was mindful to provide the revived preteen girl something to eat (Mark 5:43) makes the story both fun and inspirational. Doesn't it make you love Jesus more to behold not only His supernatural ability, but also His human vulnerability and compassion?

Lazarus

The third and final recorded occurrence of Jesus raising the dead, which is probably the best known case, is recorded only in John 11:1-44. John's Gospel was written later than the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and if it were not for his Gospel, we would not know the story of the raising of Lazarus.

When Lazarus became fatally ill, Jesus was two or three days away, most likely in Perea. Word was urgently sent by Mary and Martha about Lazarus, and after a two-day delay, Jesus began His journey to Bethany, which was a suburb to Jerusalem. Lazarus, in the meanwhile, died and was entombed. He had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived to minister to the family, weep with them (John 11:35), and ultimately to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus delayed working this miracle so that God would receive greater glory (John 11:4), and to increase the belief of Mary, Martha, and all the residents of Bethany and beyond (John 11:25-26, 40). For belief was critical in the story.

Do you believe that He Who raised the dead can loose you and let you go? That is, do you have faith that Jesus can free you from all that tempts, tries, and troubles you to let you go forward to live a life of love, service, and devotion to Him? If not, may God use this lesson as well as the full study of the life of Christ, to increase your faith in the Lord of life and to give you a new and greater outlook on life. Jesus raised the dead; may He raise your spirits as well!

LESSON 3

Jesus Healing the Sick

Mark 1:40-45

Long term relationships can be beneficial. For example, I have known my wife since November of 1974. The longer I know her the more I know about her, and the more I love her. I have known my church family since November of 1975. The longer I know them the more I know about them, and the more I love them. That may not be true for all people at all times in all respects, but the statement "To know him (her or them) is to love him (her or them)" is hopefully a testimony we can all give about a number of people in our lives. To be able to make such a claim is to say that life, in that respect, is fulfilling and rewarding.

"To know Him is to love Him;" that is, "To know Christ is to love Him." That statement, for the believer, is absolutely true in all ways at all times! We never lose by walking another day with Christ, and we always win by learning something new about Christ. To know Him better is to love Him more, and that includes knowing more about His healing ministry. He was not only a healer, but a compassionate healer. Also, His motives in healing were always selfless and noble, and as He healed His followers grew more responsive to Him as the Son of God. And may that be the outcome of this lesson for you as you study the healing ministry of Christ.

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus was a practitioner of skill and compassion. Rely upon Christ to meet your spiritual and physical needs.

A Healing Ministry

To determine the exact number of times that Jesus restored an individual's health is difficult. To perfectly coordinate the healing stories found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for counting purposes can be challenging, and verses like Luke 7:22 and John 21:25 indicate that there were many unrecorded occurrences. It is reported, however, that Jesus healed people at least seventeen times. (That count does not include instances of demonic possession and illness which will be the subject of lesson 4.) Sometimes the healing involved only one person, while at other times it involved multiple persons, as the ten lepers of Luke 17:11-19. Jesus cured people of fever, deformity, leprosy, paralysis, internal bleeding, blindness, deafness, swollen legs and arms, and a severed ear. Physically speaking Jesus was an expert in a number of areas of medical science. One thing is for certain: Jesus truly was, and is, the Great Physician!

It is interesting to note how Jesus went about His healing ministry. For example Jesus cured people on the Sabbath day on at least four occasions. Some Jewish leaders found this practice to be somewhat disturbing since, in their view, healing on the Sabbath was against Old Testament law. Jesus gently explained why He healed on the Sabbath in texts such as Luke 14:1-6 and Mark 3:1-5, and went on to perform holy day miracles on a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-5), a thirty-eight-year-old invalid (John 5:1-9), a man born blind (John 9:1-41), and a man with swollen legs and arms (Luke 14:1-6). All of these fortunate people were made whole by Jesus; and when one was questioned by unbelievers about the validity of the miracle, he simply responded to the skeptics by saying, *"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"* (John 9:25). End of argument!

In the process of healing, Jesus spat and used spittle three times: in healing a deaf man (Mark 7:32-37), in healing a blind man (Mark 8:22-26), and in healing a man born blind (John 9:1-11). In reference to the deaf man the people who witnessed the miracle proclaimed *"He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak"* (Mark 7:37).

One time Jesus was touched as He healed (Matthew 9:18-26), and seven times Jesus tenderly touched people as He was restoring their health: Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-34), a leper (Mark 1:40-45), two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), a deaf man (Mark 7:31-37), a blind man (Mark 8:22-26), another blind man (Mark 10:46-52), and then Malchus as Jesus reattached his ear (Luke 22). The feeding of the 5,000 is the other miracle recorded in each Gospel.

It is safe to say that Jesus was a tenderhearted, hands-on physician with a good "bedside manner," and that He was also consistently compassionate. That's the way He is seen in the account of

blind Bartimaeus and his blind companion in Matthew 20:29-34, and also in the story of the healing of a leper in Mark 1:40-45.

A Healing Story

Compassion is a key word in the text. *"There came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean"* (Mark 1:40-41).

Healing was evidently God's will for the leper as Jesus compassionately touched him and made him whole. Immediately his dreadful disease was cured, his hope for the future restored, and his vigor renewed. Yet Jesus does not always choose to heal. It is always scriptural to ask (James 5:13-15), but it is not always God's will to answer with the healing you desire. Instead, the illness may be a *"thorn in the flesh"* (2 Corinthians 12:7) to bring a believer into a closer and more consistent walk of fellowship with Jesus, which is rewarding beyond physical health. Or, it may be the appointed time for God to move a person from life on earth to a better and more rewarding life in heaven. Whatever the case, you can always be assured that the Lord's compassion will be full, real, and present. Regardless of what the day holds, Jesus, through His Word and Holy Spirit, will forever be compassionate toward those who rely upon Him for their spiritual and physical needs.

Speaking about spiritual needs, notice what Jesus said to the healed leper in verse 44 of the text, *"See thou say nothing to any man,"* and sent him away. Why? Because Jesus was more interested in His mission of saving people from sin sickness than any other type of illness! He was a healer and He did heal with compassion, but His primary purpose was to *"seek and to save"* (Luke 19:10) those who were lost. Everything else was secondary, and a means to the primary. So first, look to Jesus as your Savior, and then, as needs arise, look to Him as your physician — One Who cares, and One Who is capable of bringing about any healing necessary in life. For He wants you to give your afflictions to Him.

LESSON 4

Jesus Casting Out Demons

Mark 3:7-12; 5:1-20; 9:14-29

Demon possession is a dark subject. The Bible has nothing good to say about demons, which many Bible commentators believe to be fallen angels. Nor does the Bible have any uplifting news about demon possession in unbelievers, or demonic influence on believers. It's always a scary, ugly subject — one which we might comfortably avoid if we could. It's a feel-bad topic except for the amazing power of Jesus over demons! During His earthly ministry demons were as terrified of Jesus as we are of them, if not more.

The clash between Jesus and demons is easy to understand. Demons are a destructive force with absolutely no virtue. Jesus, on the other hand, is totally virtuous, and all He does is constructive. Demons cannot produce that which is good. Never can they have a wholesome and peaceful affect on people, and consequently we can take heart that Jesus always won in His battles against *"unclean spirits,"* with Mark 3:11 being a typical scenario: *"Unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God."*

The Heart of the Lesson

There is safety under the constructive care of Jesus. Always side with Jesus in the battles between good and evil.

Casting Out Demons

Mark 3:7-12 leads a person to believe that Jesus was frequently seen casting out demons, and at least seven occurrences are recorded in the New Testament. It is interesting that all seven documented cases involved healing as well as the casting out of demons, which is another indicator showing the dark side and destructive force of demons.

Two occasions involved convulsions: the Sabbath day healing of a Capernaum demoniac in Mark 1:21-28, and a demoniac boy in Mark 9:14-29. The latter case, which happened in the area of Caesarea Philippi, is a classic story involving a boy's desperate need, the compassion of Jesus, the faith of a father, and the inability of the disciples to do what Jesus did with authority.

One case involved insanity: the healing of Legion, the demoniac of Gadara, in Mark 5:1-20.

One episode involved muteness: the healing of a speechless demoniac recorded only in Matthew (9:32-34). Some Pharisees tried to discount this miracle by attributing Jesus' ability to the devil as opposed to His deity. How absurd!

One occurrence involved an unknown illness: the tender story of Jesus delivering the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman from a *"devil"* in Mark 7:24-30. The healing aspect of the miracle is mentioned in Matthew 15:21-28.

One instance involved both blindness and muteness (Matthew 12:22-37), and the final instance freed a woman from eighteen years of paralysis. It is recorded only by Luke the Physician (13:10-17). In reference to the *"blind and dumb"* man, Matthew summed it up this way: *"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw"* (12:22). Amen!

Casting Out Multiple Demons

Legion's story, which involves a multiplicity of demons as indicated by his name, is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39.

The account shows the destructive nature of demons, the fallen angels under Satan's control. Their first intent was to destroy this poor man by destroying any hope of him having a relationship with God. When that failed for the demons, they entered into and utterly destroyed about two thousand pigs instead.

The account also shows the fear demons have of Jesus. Someone has said that demons were allowed to be more active in the day of Christ so that He could demonstrate His power over them. Maybe so, but one thing is certain: Jesus is feared by all demons all the time!

For they have no question about Jesus being the Son of God, and they also know that their doom is sealed. *"Behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?"* (Matthew 8:29).

The account also shows the power of Jesus over demons. Notice that Jesus used the simple command *Go,* instead of an elaborate exorcism ritual on Legion. *"He said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters"* (Matthew 8:32).

In the meanwhile this man trusted Christ as his Savior, regained his sanity and standing in the community, and became a valuable Christian witness!

Casting Out One Demon

Peter, James, and John saw the awesome beauty of Christ at His transfiguration in Mark 9:1-13, and the next day they witnessed the contrasting ugliness of a demon possessing and terrifying a boy in Mark 9:14-29.

Listen to the testimony given by the father about his son's demon possession, before he was delivered by Christ: *"Wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away:... ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him"* (Mark 9:18, 22).

Whether a person is possessed by multiple demons (Mark 5:1-20), or by a single demon (Mark 9:14-29), demon possession has a fearful and repulsive potential.

What does that mean to a believer? Thankfully, a believer cannot be possessed by a demon as was the boy of Mark 9 because, by God's amazing grace, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and a demon, fearful of God, will not dare to tread upon that ground.

A believer, however, does have conflicts to wage against demons, and can, through spiritual neglect, come under demonic influence as warned by Paul in Ephesians 6:12. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

How does a believer fight that battle? Always with Christ! Satan and his dark forces will not so much run from you as they will Christ in you! So, *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7).

LESSON 5

Jesus Feeding the Hungry

John 2:1-11; 6:1-14

I have heard people say that the word *stressed* is the word *desserts* spelled backwards, and that you can reverse your stress by eating a dessert. That may or may not be true. Admittedly, it is hard to concentrate when you are hungry, and persistent hunger certainly does not help a person's production rate to increase nor his personality to be more pleasant. Now the Bible has a lot to say about the evils of gluttony, and gluttony is a clear and present danger for many in our land of abundance. But that is not to say that all food is bad all the time, and that the Bible does not have something good to say about eating and drinking. For that matter, at least five of the miracles that Jesus performed had to do with food and drink, which further shows that the compassion of Jesus extended to meeting the everyday needs of people. Jesus, as the Son of God Who created humans, could appreciate these common, everyday needs of people, and Jesus, as the Son of Man Who possessed human needs Himself, could appreciate them even more uniquely. So here are the stories of Jesus feeding the hungry.

The Heart of the Lesson

The compassion of Jesus extended to meeting the everyday needs of people. Trust Christ to understand your daily needs.

Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Be Hungry

"He was afterward an hungred," says Matthew 4:2 about Jesus and the first of His three temptations. Yes, Jesus knew what it was like to be hungry, and consequently He is seen on more than one occasion in the scriptures helping people to satisfy their hunger pains.

For example, Jesus recommended that Jairus' daughter be fed after she was raised from the dead. *"He commanded to give her meat"* (Luke 8:55), knowing that children always like to eat!

He taught that food should be made an object of daily prayer in Matthew 6:11. He did not suggest that they rely upon miracles for their food, and later Paul added to prayer the concept of working for food (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

He witnessed His disciples becoming hungry enough to *"pluck the ears of corn, and to eat"* on *"the sabbath day"* (Matthew 12:1), and though the Pharisees deemed this to be unlawful (Matthew 12:2), Jesus condoned their actions (Matthew 12:3-4).

Compassion was always a major factor. Jesus knew by personal experience the real pain of being without food and water, and He felt deeply for all people who experienced hunger. *"I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat"* (Mark 8:2). And with that Jesus compassionately and miraculously fed the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-10)!

Jesus Fed People Five Times Through Miracles

Providing for people was the primary motivation behind Jesus' first miracle. His purpose was not just to astound the world with His mighty power, but to fill a real and common human need. With that He turned the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, which is a miracle recorded only by John (2:1-11). The miracle was done at the bidding of His mother, and involved 6 water pots holding 20 to 30 gallons each for a total of 120 to 180 gallons of wine. The wine could have been non-fermented grape juice, or at least diluted wine, as Jesus would have been true to the principles of soberness taught so clearly in the Old Testament (Proverbs 20:1). But the important points are that Jesus was aware of the needs of people and acted upon it, and that He kept the groom and his family from being humiliated during the week-long celebration. By this *"his disciples believed on him"* (John 2:11).

The next occurrence was the feeding of the 5,000, which is probably the best known miracle of Christ as it is recorded in all four

Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). Jesus began with five barley loaves and two small fish, and after prayer produced enough food to feed a crowd of approximately 20,000, including men, women and children, and to have twelve full baskets remaining. Wow! That's a whole lot of caring that produced a whole lot of believing (John 6:14)!

Next was the feeding of the 4,000, or 16,000 including women and children (Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10), followed by the feeding of four of His disciples with a great catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11), and finally by the feeding of seven of His disciples with a great catch of 153 large fish after His resurrection (John 21:1-14).

Jesus did care, and food was a concern — as are all of our daily needs.

Jesus Knew There Was a Greater Hunger Than Physical Hunger

There was a pattern. People became hungry. Jesus was aware of it. He cared. He compassionately fed them, and some of them believed. Yet Jesus also realized that there was a hunger greater than physical hunger. It was a spiritual hunger about which He said, *"For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.... I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"* (John 6:33, 35).

The people who first heard those words responded by saying *"give us this bread"* (John 6:34). Yes, everyone hungers for bread — the bread that sustains physical life, and the Bread Who secures eternal life for the believer.

If you are physically hungry, look to Jesus. Pray (Matthew 6:11) and work (2 Thessalonians 3:10) for food, and trust Jesus to compassionately provide the necessities of life.

If you are spiritually hungry, look to Jesus. He is *"the bread of life."* In Him you will find true and full satisfaction. In Him you will be secured for eternity. In Him you will be set to partake of *"the tree of life"* (Revelation 22:2) for ever and ever.

LESSON 6

Jesus Performing Miracles

Luke 8:22-25; John 6:15-21; Matthew 17:24-27; Mark 11:12-14

No one knows exactly how many miracles Jesus performed altogether. Even scholars disagree in that A. T. Robertson reports thirty-five recorded miracles, H. L. Willmington lists thirty-six, and John MacArthur and W. A. Criswell have accounted for thirty-seven. And then there are the unrecorded miracles of Jesus whose number, according to the following Scriptures, must have been exceedingly high: Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40-41; 5:15; 6:17-19; 7:21-22; John 2:23; 3:2; 4:45; 20:30-31; 21:25.

The reasons to believe in Jesus by faith are not exclusively dependent upon His ability to do the supernatural, but His miracles do help us to appreciate, love and serve Him more — as His miracles revealed to humanity the very nature of God. Others in the Bible performed miracles (Moses, Gideon, Elijah, Elisha, Paul), but more are ascribed to Jesus than any other biblical figure, and it is spiritually healthy for us to put ourselves in a position to be overawed by His miracles just as those who first witnessed them. *"They were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him"* (Mark 1:27).

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus through supernatural ability revealed the nature of God. Stand amazed at the ability of Jesus to perform miracles.

The miracles of Christ are recorded in all four Gospels. Matthew and Luke reported the most, and John the least — even though John recorded six miracles not found in the synoptic Gospels, including such notable miracles as Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine (John 2) and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

Jesus Stilled the Storm at Sea

The miracle of Jesus stilling the first storm on the Sea of Galilee is recorded in Luke 8:22-25, and also in Matthew 8:23-27 and Mark 4:35-41.

The Sea of Galilee is 629 feet below sea level, and is bordered on the north by Mount Hermon with an elevation of 9,200 feet. That is a difference of nearly 10,000 feet, and when the cold winds come sweeping down from Mount Hermon, the lake erupts in sudden and violent storms.

That apparently happened on a day when Jesus and His disciples were in a ship on the lake. This storm put the lives of His followers in jeopardy, and even though He was asleep at the time, Jesus awoke *"and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm"* (verse 24). Thus Jesus gave up His convenience for the sake of His disciples.

Calm is a key word. Jesus confidently performed the miracle for the protection of His disciples. They were not out of God's will by being in the ship or on the lake, as they were simply doing what Jesus told them to do in verse 22. So the storm did not sweep down to punish them, but to teach them a wonderful truth. By the miracle Jesus showed the disciples that He cared for them when their lives were in trouble and danger. The miracle also clearly revealed the power of the Son of God over nature and proved the deity of Christ.

The disciples were not perfect in the matter. Their faith needed to be strengthened, but they did take note of what Jesus did and responded by exclaiming *"What manner of man is this! For he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him"* (verse 25).

Stand amazed at the miracle maker. Have faith in Jesus. As a believer, He cares for you in the storms of life which are certain to happen — even when you are living within God's will.

Jesus Walked on Water

The second miracle in a storm on the Sea of Galilee is recorded in John 6:15-21, Matthew 14:23-33, and Mark 6:45-52. It is probably the best known miracle of Christ in the secular world since it involved Jesus walking on water.

This was a double miracle in that Jesus calmed the raging sea, and also that the boat instantly arrived at its destination as soon as Jesus stepped into the boat (John 6:21).

The story had everything necessary for a scary night on the water: *"dark"* (John 6:17), *"afraid"* (John 6:19), *"great wind"* (John 6:18), *"tossed with waves"* (Matthew 14:24), *"troubled"* (Matthew 14:26), *"fear"* (Matthew 14:26), *"toiling"* (Mark 6:48), and *"cried out"* (Mark 6:49). But it also had, in addition to His saving act, these comforting words of Jesus: *"Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid"* (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50).

Once again the disciples were within God's will (Mark 6:45), and this was also the occasion upon which Jesus taught Peter a lesson on *"faith"* and *"doubt"* as he too, to his credit, attempted to walk on water (Matthew 14:28-30).

The response of the disciples to Jesus' miracle in Mark 6:51 is inspiring, *"They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered,"* but it is what they said about Jesus that really makes this miracle special. In reference to the first storm they said *"What manner of man is this!"* (Luke 8:25), but this time they exclaimed, *"Of a truth thou art the Son of God"* (Matthew 14:33).

Yes! Jesus truly was and is amazing. His practice of caring so deeply for people is amazing. His willingness and ability to comfort people is amazing. His power to rescue people is amazing, and it is by faith in Him, and our amazement of Him, that we welcome Jesus to come to our rescue as well.

Jesus Provided Tax Money Through a Fish

Jesus' miracle of providing tax money through a fish was recorded only by Matthew (17:24-27), who himself was a former tax collector.

The temple tax was paid annually by all males over twenty years of age. The tax was a half-shekel, which was equal to two days of wages for the typical worker. The money was used for the upkeep of the temple. Actually the temple tax was not owed by Jesus since He was the Son of God as kings of that period did not collect taxes from their sons (Matthew 17:25), but Jesus, not wanting to offend anyone and to set a right example, was willing to pay the tax.

The problem was that Jesus, the One Who had no *"where to lay his head"* (Matthew 8:20), also had no money to pay the tax. So it was time for another miracle, and with that Jesus said to Peter, *"Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee"* (Matthew 17:27).

What a miracle! Money does not grow on trees, but in fish instead; or at least on this occasion it did as Peter apparently obeyed, caught the fish, retrieved the money, and paid the tax.

The more you think about the miracle the more astonishing it becomes, as one of three scenarios most likely took place. (1) Jesus instantly created a fish with a coin in its mouth, and positioned the fish to be caught; or (2) Jesus immediately caused a fish to swallow a coin, and positioned the fish to be caught; or (3) Jesus knew there was a fish in the lake that had already swallowed a coin, and positioned the fish to be caught. Whatever the process, it truly is an amazing story and one that should deepen our appreciation for Christ. The miracle was not necessarily designed to cause people to have greater ease on April 15, but to increase the heart rate any time that you think about the wonders of Jesus.

Jesus Cursed the Fig Tree

The cursing of the fig tree, which is recorded in Mark 11:12-14 and Matthew 21:18-19, happened in Bethany near Jerusalem during the crucifixion week. Unlike the other supernatural occurrences considered in this lesson, this miracle was performed by Jesus primarily to teach a spiritual truth and a lesson pertinent to His age and ours. *"And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it"* (Mark 11:12-14).

Later, as Jesus and the disciples passed again by the fig tree, Peter noted that the tree had *"withered away from the roots"* (Mark 11:19-21). Jesus took the opportunity to teach another lesson on faith (Mark 11:22-25), and also a lesson on spiritual fruit.

The fig tree, by its appearance, promised to provide fruit. It did not. It was misleading, hypocritical, and fruitless. It had the potential to provide fruit, but fell short. Regretfully, Israel at the time was doing the same to Jesus. Israel could have been spiritually productive, but due to a lack of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, they failed and were withering away spiritually instead. They looked religious, but they had no real relationship with God.

That is sad. It was sad for Israel and for any person who comes into spiritual contact with Jesus and fails to be amazed at how capably He reached out to humanity, especially the reaching of the cross!

Be awed by Jesus. Have faith in Him, and allow Jesus to produce spiritual fruit in you.

LESSON 7

Jesus Teaching in Parables

Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 10:30-37

My favorite childhood book was the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. It was a little more adventurous than *Tom Sawyer,* and I could associate Huck's adventures along the Mississippi River with my own adventures on Main Street in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. My dad's place of employment was on one end of town, the Boy's Club was on the other end, and the Center Theatre was in between. These were my summer hangouts, and in those days an elementary school senior (fifth and sixth grades) and junior high school freshman (seventh and eighth grades) could walk the streets of downtown Little Rock by himself and without fear. I would enjoy my own adventures by day and read about Huck's and Tom's by night. Life was good, and stories made it better.

Samuel Clemens was a good storyteller. I admire his work to this day, and I have even retraced some of his steps along the Mississippi River. But he does not compare to the story-telling ability of Jesus! To think about the prayers and thoughts that Jesus had to put into each one of His parables is to appreciate Him as a masterful storyteller. The originality, color, mystery, and intrigue that He packed into His short stories is unquestionably remarkable, and once the

The Heart of the Lesson

As a master teacher Jesus both communicated and illustrated truth. Grow in the knowledge of God by hearing the parables of Christ.

inspired truth that He also incorporated into the tales is considered, you know without doubt that His literature stands absolutely alone.

It is our privilege in this lesson to read after Jesus Christ. He told some stories that no one else thought to or could, and His stories always contained eternal truth. Be amazed as you study His parables!

Information About Parables

The English word *parable* comes from the Greek word *parabole* which means "a laying by the side of, a comparison or likeness, a likeness between two realities." So a parable is a teaching in the form of a story, one that both communicates and illustrates truth. Speaking about parables, someone said, "Jesus' stories are like wrapped gifts." They are gift wrapped to captivate the attention of believers, and sometimes to distract unbelievers.

Distracting someone from the truth might seem inconsistent with the character of Jesus, but Isaiah foretold that such a thing would happen (6:9-10), and it did happen from time to time (Matthew 13) as Jesus hid the truth from unreceptive and unappreciative people who first needed to hear and heed the simple message of salvation in Christ. Jesus did not want to confuse those people with the higher learning of Christianity when they needed to start with the basic message that Jesus saves, much like you would not want to burden a toddler with all the troubling details of the evening news. Even believers occasionally struggled with the meaning of Jesus' parables, and that is why Jesus, after speaking certain parables (Matthew 13:1-9), then explained the parables (Matthew 13:24-30).

The number of parables spoken by Jesus is difficult to determine, primarily due to one's definition of a parable. For instance, the Dallas Seminary faculty counts thirty-five, H. L. Willmington lists thirty-eight, John MacArthur and W. A. Criswell account for thirty-nine, George Buttrick in his book *The Parables of Jesus* writes about forty-four, and A. T. Robertson tops the list with fifty-two. Also some parables are easy to identify as parables, such as the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-3, 10), while others, such as Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31), are not easily identified. Some commentators think of Lazarus and the Rich Man as a parable; others see it as a true and actual story. No one can be absolutely certain. But this fact is known: the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man is not called a parable in the text, and if it is a parable, it is the only one with a proper name (Lazarus). You take it from there.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the parables of Christ; John reported none. In John MacArthur's list of thirty-nine, Matthew recorded twenty, Mark nine, and Luke twenty-seven. That makes Luke

recording the most, and John recording the least since he did not mention the parables at all.

Jesus' parables covered topics such as salvation, God's love for sinners, repentance, compassion for people, spiritual stability, forgiveness, Satan, prayer, stewardship, hell, ungodly attitudes, humility, wealth, the church, the kingdom of heaven, the human heart, the final judgment, preparation for eternity, and Israel. Jesus was not only an original and colorful teacher, but well-versed and varied in His subjects.

Examples of Parables

The parable of The Sower is a case where the story is clearly called a parable (Matthew 13:3); also it was recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:2-20; Luke 8:4-15. It speaks about the condition of the human heart and also highlights the nature of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the topic most often addressed by Jesus in the parables. Apparently Jesus wanted believers who were open to Him and growing in His truth to know more about *"the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 13:11).

The parable of The Sower also exemplifies how the parables of Christ related to the everyday matters of life. Jesus spoke parables from the viewpoint of business, shepherding, weddings, fishing, and a number about farming with the parable of The Sower being one. Actually the story was about the sower, the seed, and the soil.

A farmer sowed seed upon four different types of soil, which produced four different results. On roadside soil the seed was soon devoured by birds. On shallow, rocky soil the seed sprang up quickly, but soon withered away under the scorching sun. On thorn-infested soil the seed was quickly choked down by the thorns. And on fertile soil the seed produced a thirty-, sixty-, and even hundred-fold crop.

Now what did all of this mean? As explained by Christ the seed represented the Good News about the kingdom, and the soil symbolized the conditions of the human heart. The roadside soil represented those who hear the Word but do not understand it, allowing Satan to steal it from them. The shallow, rocky soil represented those who have no spiritual depth, and thus drop out when they experience difficulties or persecution. The thorn-infested soil represented those who allow the temptations of the world and wealth to choke out the Good News. And the fertile soil represented those who truly accepted God's Word, allowing His truth to produce in them an abundant spiritual harvest.

Jesus told this story, and a number of other parables (The Growing Seed, Mark 4:26-29; The Tares, Matthew 13:24-30; The Mustard

Seed, Matthew 13:31-32; The Leaven, Matthew 13:33-35), while sitting in a ship and speaking to a large crowd of people gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He realized that many people in the gathering would not be *"good ground"* (Matthew 13:8, 23), but good ground was certainly His desire as He wanted them to hear and connect with lifesaving truth, and He truly desires the same for you!

The parable of The Good Samaritan is an example of a parable not being directly identified as a parable. Most scholars believe that the story found in Luke 10:30-37 is a parable, as opposed to an actual, real-life story, and it is most likely the best known parable of Christ in both the spiritual and secular worlds.

The tale of the Good Samaritan teaches the moral of being a good neighbor (verse 36), and also the virtue of compassion (verse 33). A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was met by thieves, a priest, a Levite, and finally by a Samaritan. The thieves by their actions said "What is yours is ours, and we are going to take it." The cold-hearted priest and Levite said, "What is mine is mine, and I am going to keep it." And the Samaritan, a man Jesus' listeners surely would have despised, said, "What is mine is also yours, and I am going to share it." Thus he becomes famously known as the Good Samaritan, and is the hero of this colorful story.

It's not being religious or having religious status that counts, but having true compassion and being a good neighbor. That's important! That's why we need Christ in our hearts to give us that compassion, helping us to become good neighbors. And that's the truth taught by Christ, illustrated by Christ, modeled by Christ, and now, through the parable of The Good Samaritan, recommended by Christ: *"Go, and do thou likewise"* (verse 37).

LESSON 8

Jesus Preaching to People

Luke 4:16-31; 6:20-49; Matthew 5:1-7:29; 24:1-25:46; John 10:1-18

Long ago on a Sunday night I snuck away from my home church to attend the evening service of Immanuel Baptist Church near the Arkansas state capitol building in Little Rock. My dad had for years talked about Immanuel's legendary pastor, Dr. W. O. Vaught, and his unique preaching ability. My dad was right! I entered the old, stately building, chose a pew down front to the right of the pulpit, participated in a traditional music service, and then Dr. Vaught methodically approached the pulpit. As he did a large screen behind him automatically dropped down from the massive ceiling, and he began to preach using an overhead projector to jot down his points; that was state-of-the-art at the time. He did not preach as an evangelist, but as a teacher. He preached with clarity, frankness, confidence, and precision. I had never heard anyone quite like him, and I must admit as a young preacher that I was overawed by his distinctiveness as a spiritual and biblical speaker. I never returned to Immanuel because I had duties in my beloved home church, but to this day I can still easily envision Dr. Vaught in the pulpit of that great church.

In the years after the Immanuel experience, I also got to hear Dr. W. A. Criswell, Angel Martinez, Vance Havner, Dr. Charles Stanley,

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus was a preacher of incomparable quality. Listen to the sermons of Jesus, and learn how to live the abundant life He offers.

and Dr. Adrian Rogers preach in person, and I was abundantly blessed by each of them. And certainly I cannot forget my faithful pastors — the men who not only preached the truth with passion, but showed me by their behavior how to live the truth. Yes, preachers have been a powerful and positive influence in my life. Then there is one preacher Who ranks far beyond all the rest, and that is Jesus! Jesus was the preacher of preachers. His sermons were original, stood alone in their day, have passed the test of time, and were presented in an unprecedented fashion.

Sermon Summary

Is it a recorded conversation, a lesson, or a sermon? That is a difficult question, and one reason why there are different opinions on the number of sermons preached by Jesus. H. L. Willmington has listed 16 sermons in his book *Willmington's Guide to the Bible.* Some of the sermons are brief (a sermon about John the Baptist recorded in Matthew 11:7-15; Luke 7:24-30); others have more length (the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7; Luke 6). Here is H. L. Willmington's full list: a sermon about Himself in the first year of His ministry (Luke 4), the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), a sermon about the kingdom of heaven while sitting in a boat (Matthew 13), a sermon on John the Baptist (Matthew 11), a sermon about judgment (John 5), a sermon that ended with the disciples being sent out two by two (Mark 6), the sermon about the Bread of Life (John 6), a sermon defending His disciples and relating to ceremonial defilement (Mark 7), a sermon of self defense in the temple (John 8), the sermon on the Good Shepherd (John 10), a sermon of rebuke (Mark 9), a sermon to the seventy as they departed to witness (Luke 10), a sermon about religious hypocrites (Matthew 23), the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), the well-known sermon on heaven (John 14), and the sermon on the vine and the branches (John 15-16).

Sermon Reviews

The first sermon Jesus preached took place in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth during the Great Galilean Ministry. It is recorded in Luke 4:16-31, and His text was Isaiah 58:6; 61:1-2. Though Jesus proclaimed nothing but the truth about Himself, the sermon was not well received by His fellow townsmen, and He was rejected both as a person and preacher. Had Jesus been preaching for personal fame, He would have probably given up after His first sermon. Yet His calling was too high to quit. His mission was to tell people the truth to the salvation of their souls, and consequently He continued on His preaching tour, but He only visited Nazareth one more time (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6).

The Sermon on the Mount occurred during the second year of Jesus' ministry not far from Capernaum. Matthew 5:1 says that it happened on a *"mountain,"* and Luke 6:17 further explains that it was *"in the plain"* or on a level place on the mountain. The sermon, which is probably the best known sermon in the world, takes about fifteen minutes to read. The sermon introduces the fundamentals and standards of the Christian life as Jesus spoke on such topics as the beatitudes, the law, charitable deeds, prayer (including the Model Prayer), fasting, murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love, love of enemies, devotion to God, money, worldly aims, worry, criticism, judging others, salvation, the spiritual kingdom, and the Golden Rule — complete with interesting illustrations. It has been said that the Sermon on the Mount is "the Bible condensed."

When Jesus finished the sermon, the multitudes who heard it had to respond (Matthew 7:28-29). The sermon was too powerful to do otherwise. The 400 silent years had been loudly broken by a sermon of unquestionable authority, and the people had to accept and apply it or condemn and reject it. For there is no middle ground with Jesus!

The Good Shepherd Sermon (John 10:1-18) was delivered during the third year of Jesus' ministry. Jesus preached the sermon in Jerusalem in fulfillment of Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34, and in doing so He presented Himself as the Good Shepherd to everyone who believes. The sermon is a classic example of Jesus telling the truth simply, and living the truth perfectly. He is not only a worthy door to salvation, but the only door to salvation!

The Olivet Discourse was a sermon preached by Jesus to His disciples on the Mount of Olives during the final week of His ministry. It is recorded in Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36. It is the premiere sermon on end-time events and Jesus' second advent. A. T. Robertson calls it "The Great Eschatological Discourse."

Space will not permit a review of the farewell sermon (John 14) of Jesus to His disciples in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion, the sermon on the way to Gethsemane (John 15-16), or the other sermons listed in the summary. All of them, from the shortest to the longest, were and are great. They are worthy of reading, study, and application, and all of them will lead you to abundant life which Jesus offers.

LESSON 9

Jesus Praying to the Father

Luke 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9:28-29; Matthew 26:30, 36-46

Pray without ceasing. I have a pastor friend who concludes each of his church newsletter articles with those words. Week after week, there the words are at the bottom of the front page underneath his comments — *Pray without ceasing.* What a marvelous idea, and what an encouraging message to his church family. No wonder that church is so spiritually healthy!

The words *pray without ceasing* were written by the apostle Paul to the believers of Thessalonica and recorded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. It is a teaching of Paul, but it is also indicative of the daily walk of Christ as He prayed without ceasing to the Father. That is, Jesus was always in the spirit of prayer. He prayed repeatedly, perseveringly, and regularly about many things for many reasons. Prayer was clearly His attitude as reported by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Some Teachings on Prayer

Christ was a master teacher, and prayer was one of His favorite subjects. He taught a parable on prayer *"that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."* It is the parable of The Persistent Widow recorded in Luke 18:1-8.

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus was always in the spirit of prayer. Follow Jesus in developing an attitude of prayer.

He taught on prayer by request. As Jesus Himself was praying, His disciples approached Him with the request *"teach us to pray"* (Luke 11:1). That prompted Jesus to teach the Model Prayer (Luke 11:2-4), and to continue the class session with the well-known statement, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"* (Luke 11:9). This teaching was also part of the Sermon on the Mount, and is recorded in Matthew 6:8-13; 7:7-11.

Jesus also taught about the power of prayer in Mark 9:29, the strength of group prayer in Matthew 18:19-20, and the value of praying in His name in John 14:13-15; 15:16; 16:23-26.

In each of these cases, and at other times as well, Jesus taught on prayer with great insight, authority, and skill, and His personal prayer life added credibility to His teachings!

Some Occasions of Prayer

Once again it is difficult to determine an exact number in reference to the particular events in the life of Christ, including His prayers. Herbert Lockyer lists sixteen of Jesus' prayers in his book *All the Prayers of the Bible*, and H. L. Willmington records nineteen in *Willmington's Guide to the Bible.*

All of the prayers of Jesus, from those that are brief (John 11:41-42) to those that are long (John 17:1-26), are significant and worthy of consideration. Plus the following four prayers all occurred at critical times.

Jesus prayed on the day of His baptism (Luke 3:21-22). The content of the prayer is not recorded, but just to know that He began His public ministry with prayer is inspirational and exemplary. If the Son of God saw the need to pray in relation to ministry, how much more should we see the need!

Jesus prayed before selecting the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16). The choice was critical, so *"he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God"* (Luke 6:12). Thus God the Father revealed His perfect will to Jesus, and the process of calling the twelve apostles was appropriately conducted. Always pray before making a decision!

Jesus prayed at His transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29). What He prayed is unknown, but the fact that He was glorified as He was praying is made clear in the text. That's significant. If we truly want to know the glory of God, we must pray!

Jesus prayed at Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion (Matthew 26:30, 36-46). It was an emotional prayer spoken in three parts. In addition to the horror brought on by thoughts of the impending arrest, trial, and execution, Jesus was about to take upon Himself the

full weight of the sins of all the world, and for the first time to know what it was like to be separated from fellowship with the Father. Therefore, as the Son of Man with human frailties, Jesus prayed seeking direction, comfort, and strength. The sleeping apostles were of little help that night; but God the Father came to His rescue, and Jesus, on the worst night of His life, was able to persevere and accomplish His earthly mission. On the gloomy days and dark nights of your life remember to pray, and God will also help you to see the way!

Some Reasons for Prayer

Jesus sent out seventy witnesses in Luke 10:1-16. When they returned from their successful preaching tour to report about their victories *"with joy"* (Luke 10:17), Jesus responded with an immediate prayer of thanksgiving to the Father (Luke 10:21-22). Gratitude is always God's will (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and prayer is the ever-available, God-given tool to use in expressing it!

Jesus prayed a prayer of blessing upon children that is recorded in Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16. All of God's children need His blessings, and all of God's children can pray to receive His blessings for themselves and others!

Before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus prayed to the Father and thanked Him for answered prayer (John 11:41-42). Do you remember to thank God for answered prayer?

Jesus, in the process of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, became *"troubled"* (John 12:27) and prayed. His prayer was partly communion with God and partly petition to God. The Father responded with encouragement (John 12:27-33), and Jesus went on to fulfill the task given Him by God. Pray without ceasing, especially in times of trouble!

Jesus prayed the high priestly prayer, which is also known as the Lord's Prayer, on the eve of His crucifixion (John 17:1-26), and He did so for multiple reasons. Jesus prayed for Himself and the Father to be glorified, for people to be saved and to be secure in their salvation, for believers to know true joy and to be kept from evil, for believers to be unified, and for eternal fellowship with believers. It's the longest prayer in the New Testament, and it teaches believers, among other things, to take all matters to God in prayer.

Jesus prayed for believers to receive the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, the three-part prayer for strength in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30, 36-46), three prayers with petitions while on the cross (lesson 11), and many other unrecorded prayers with specific requests in mind. Jesus maintained an attitude of prayer, and He taught His followers to do the same. To quote my pastor friend, "Pray without ceasing"!

LESSON 10

Jesus Saving the Lost

Luke 18:35-43; 19:1-10

Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick, delivered the demon possessed, fed the hungry, taught the unlearned, and prayed for the needy, but most importantly Jesus came *"to seek and to save"* people — all kinds of people in all walks of life. Jesus, as the only qualified sacrifice, voluntarily died for all people and thereby paid the full price of their sins (Romans 5:8; 6:23). So Jesus made eternal salvation possible for all people who believe (John 3:16), and as the gospel story goes He even made personal contact with some whose salvation stories are told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Jesus did not live a complex life to the confusion of people; His life was sinless and simple. Mark Twain said in jest, "The work of many scholars has already thrown much darkness on the subject, and it is likely if they keep working, we shall soon know nothing at all." But that is just the opposite of the life of Christ! By His sacrifice people can be saved, and because of His quiet, unassuming, modest and innocent character, manner, and lifestyle, salvation is made desirable. Trust Him with your life now, and in the hereafter.

The Summary

Jesus said, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"* (John 12:32). All people who were saved in the New Tes-

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus, by personal contact, sought to save the lost. Trust Jesus to save you, and proclaim Him to be the Savior of the world.

tament were equally drawn to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and some of them also had personal contact with Jesus. Now their stories and testimonies are available for our inspiration. Men and women, wealthy and poor, healthy and sick, religious and irreligious — Jesus touched all kinds of people, and all kinds of people can still be saved today!

Jesus frequently had *soul* talks. The exact number of times, however, that Jesus witnessed one on one and the individual was saved is unknown. On some of the occasions the person's salvation is announced, but no actual testimony is given. In Luke's Gospel, for example, that happened to a man of whom Jesus said, *"Man, thy sins are forgiven thee"* (5:20), to an immoral woman of whom Jesus said, *"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven"* (7:47), and to the thief on the cross of whom Jesus said, *"To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (23:43). Similar stories are also found in Matthew, Mark, and John.

On other occasions Jesus witnessed, the person was saved, testimony was given, and the new convert went on to bear evidence by living the Christian life. That happened to a leper who was saved in Samaria (Luke 17:11-19), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and to a woman who was healed on the Sabbath day (Luke 13:11-13). In the latter case the Bible says that she simply *"glorified God"* (verse 13), and so should we in relation to the saving grace of Jesus!

The Sampling

Because every salvation story is eternally significant, and because everyone would consider his own story to be the most amazing example of God's grace, it is hard to pick one story to the neglect of others. But pick we must, and two from the Gospel of Luke stand out to me. Both stories happened in or near the city of Jericho and occurred on the same day. Jesus saved a poor man on the wrong side of town in the first story, and a rich man on the right side of town in the second. Both were sinners and needed to be saved. Both were saved, and their lives were dramatically changed.

The story of the healing and saving of blind Bartimaeus is recorded in Luke 18:35-43 (also in Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52). It took place during Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as He had just crossed the Jordan River from Perea and was on His way to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. On the way as He approached Jericho, which was about five miles from the river, Jesus met begging Bartimaeus who was at the time both physically and spiritually blind (verse 35). Bartimaeus approached Jesus for healing, showed respect to Jesus and a hint of faith as he called Him *"Son of David"* (verse 38), and was apparently saved in the process of receiving his sight as Jesus officially announced *"thy faith hath saved thee"* (verse 42). By

faith Bartimaeus received both physical and spiritual sight! This blessing was due to the Jesus' openness, His compassion (Matthew 20:34), and His ability to save.

Bartimaeus gave evidence of his salvation as he followed Jesus and glorified God (verse 43), and the residents of Jericho set a good example for us to follow as *"when they saw it, gave praise unto God"* (verse 43).

Bartimaeus and his friend (Matthew 20:30) were possibly the poorest men in town, and Zacchaeus was possibly the richest (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus, however, did not choose one over the other. He did not look with disdain on Bartimaeus because he was a poor, blind beggar, nor on Zacchaeus because he was a wealthy publican (verse 2). Again, both men were sinners. Both men needed to be saved, and both men were saved by the amazing grace of Jesus.

Zacchaeus joyfully received Christ (verse 6), and Jesus gladly announced *"This day is salvation come to this house"* (verse 9) as Zacchaeus bore clear evidence of being saved in verse 8. *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."*

There is a salvation success story in Luke 18 (Bartimaeus) and another one in Luke 19 (Zacchaeus), but Jesus did not reach everyone to whom He witnessed. For in Luke 18 there is also the tragic story of the Rich Young Ruler (verses 18-30). He had everything going for him: age, wealth, prestige, religion, and family status. Yet something in his life was terribly missing, and while Jesus was traveling through Perea, the young man approached Jesus about the need. Jesus was willing. He stopped along the way to talk with the young man, took note that he was too earthly bound to look to Jesus in faith, and then had to continue on His journey to Jerusalem to sacrifice Himself for the benefit of all people. The young man missed his chance. He could have been saved. Instead, wrapped up in himself and his stuff, he turned from Jesus and went away *"very sorrowful"* (verse 23). Don't let that happen to you. Trust Jesus to save you, and proclaim Him to be the Savior of the world. Then you will have the fulfillment for which the Rich Young Ruler searched.

LESSON 11

Jesus Speaking From the Cross

Luke 23:34, 42-43; John 19:25-27; Matthew 27:45-46; John 19:28-30; Luke 23:44-46

The seven sayings which Jesus spoke from the cross are a picture window into His true character. In the King James Version of the Bible the combined statements are only fifty-two simple English words, but each word is a powerful testimony to the goodness of our Savior. Not one of His words was ugly, defeating, or selfish. None of them were ill-spoken in a spirit of doubt, bitterness, or faultfinding. Each word came from a mind clearly focused on redeeming people, an attitude of forgiveness, and a heart filled with selfless love. When we read the words of Christ spoken from the cross, we cannot help but to grow in love and appreciation for Him.

First Saying: Words of Forgiveness

"*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34).

This prayer, spoken sometime during the first three hours on the cross, was worded especially for the soldiers who had mocked Jesus, played games for His garments, scourged Him, and crucified Him. The soldiers, however, who did not recognize the enormity of their sin were also representative of the Jews who were out to protect their

The Heart of the Lesson

As Jesus spoke from the cross His godly character was revealed to the world. Listen to the words which Jesus spoke while on the cross, and learn to love Him more.

religious system at all costs, the Romans who cared only for their political system, and every other person who stands in need of His forgiveness.

The words of forgiveness were the fulfillment of prophecy which proved the deity of Jesus (Isaiah 53:12), and were the essence of His ministry as He had already forgiven and would forgive again and again (Luke 5:24; Luke 23:43; Romans 6:23). He taught forgiveness (Luke 6:36; 17:4), proved love through forgiveness (Luke 6:27-28), and modeled forgiveness during the agonizing moments on the cross. For as Jesus has forgiven us, we should forgive others (Ephesians 4:32). Then we too, like Jesus, will be free from bitterness and resentment.

Second Saying: Words of Redemption

"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

This statement, which was also spoken during the first three hours on the cross, was addressed to the thief who trusted Christ as his personal Savior. The thief could in no way save himself, so he, unlike his disbelieving fellow criminal, gave his life to Christ in just the nick of time. Through his act of repentance, confession, and faith he received the promise of paradise.

Paradise is a synonym for heaven in its incomplete state, and the term also conjures up visions of the Garden of Eden. Imagine that — from a life of crime to a life in paradise, from prison to paradise, from crucifixion to paradise, and from a future in hell to a future in heaven! The day went well for the believing thief, and Jesus is certainly to be appreciated for His willingness and ability to save on the crucifixion day!

The thief's salvation was also the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:37). The Romans crucified Jesus to humiliate Him, but the Father used it to show the world that Jesus was the Messiah and the Way of salvation (John 14:6).

It may be too late for some things in your life, but if you are lost and reading this lesson, it's not too late to be saved. Trust Him now!

Third Saying: Words of Love

"Woman, behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26-27).

The final saying of the first three hours was spoken to John and Mary about Mary's personal needs. It was a tender moment of respect and care for His mother, as she too was feeling the deep pain of the cross just as Simeon had predicted (Luke 2:34-35).

Joseph was probably deceased by this time, and Jesus' siblings were not yet believers (John 7:5). So Jesus looked to John, the apostle of love, to take care of His mother.

Woman was a term of endearment, much like saying dear woman, for Mary desperately needed encouragement and comfort, and the affection she received through this saying helped her to continue in the cause of Christ (Acts 1:14).

Not surprisingly the One Who said, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28) did not, when times were difficult, forget His mother!

Fourth Saying: Words of Desolation

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

The last four sayings were spoken in quick succession toward the end of the last three hours, just before Jesus died. Those three hours, as symbolized by the darkness, were the most difficult of His life, and the sayings were all extremely brief due to the shortness of breath and the closeness of death.

The words of desolation were in fulfillment of prophecy (Psalm 22:1), and were evidence of the great physical and emotional pain Jesus was enduring. Because He became sin for us in that moment, because He felt our guilt and had never before known guilt, and because He was for the first time separated from the Father Who could not look upon sin, Jesus cried out in anguish *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* He could bear the pain and separation no longer, and only in eternity will we be able to fully appreciate the depth of His sacrifice for us.

Though the Father could not look favorably upon Jesus in those moments in which He became our sin, He could send darkness to cover His Son from the prying eyes of the heartless spectators, and that He did with an exclamation mark. He also distracted the crowd with a meaningful earthquake, tearing of the temple veil, and the opening of the tombs of saints. To Jesus, as the Son of Man, it felt like He was totally alone, yet God the Father was there in the vastness of His space and the eternity of His time. He guarded His Son and received His sacrifice for our sin.

Fifth Saying: Words of Suffering

"I thirst" (John 19:28).

To stay alert so that He could voluntarily give His life, Jesus refused the first numbing drink offered to Him (Matthew 27:33-34). But now the situation was different, and He requested a drink. This too fulfilled prophecy (Psalm 69:3, 21), and it was also a clear indica-

tion of His humanity (Hebrews 4:14-15). Jesus had a real human body, and He knew real human suffering. But the drink also had a practical purpose. The day was growing long. He was weary, and His throat had to be dry. It was almost 3:00 p.m., and He had two more important things He needed to say. So He requested the drink which mildly quenched His thirst and enabled Him to speak the last two sayings.

Sixth Saying: Words of Victory

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke recorded the sixth saying, but they did mention that Jesus *"cried with a loud voice."* *"It is finished"* was one word in the Greek language, *tetelestai,* and it was spoken in the Greek perfect tense which means it is finished, it stands finished, and it will always be finished.

It may have been a cry of relief as His sufferings were coming to an end, but it was definitely a cry of victory for Jesus' completed work on earth. He did not say "I am finished" in defeat, but "It is finished" in victory!

The saying was spoken in victory; Jesus was in control (John 10:18; Galatians 2:20). His death was not by accident, but by divine appointment.

The saying was spoken in satisfaction; all of the Old Testament prophecies that were supposed to be fulfilled by the Messiah at this point were fulfilled by Jesus.

The saying was spoken to Satan; he lost (Genesis 3:15).

The saying was spoken to the world; the work of salvation was complete, nothing needed to be added (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Seventh Saying: Words of Contentment

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23: 46).

The final saying indicates that Jesus died not only willingly (John 10:18) and victoriously (John 19:30), but also confidently (Luke 23:46). His words were quoted from Psalm 31:5 and show that the cross was a reality but by no means an end, as the word *commend* means "to deposit, to commit for safe keeping." Now believers can have this same assurance (2 Timothy 1:12).

Jesus' words of contentment, as well as the other statements, drew a response: one of concern by his acquaintance (Luke 23:49), one of guilt by the crowd (Luke 23:48), and one of faith by the centurion who had witnessed the way that Jesus had accepted His sufferings. His response was *"Certainly this was a righteous man"* (Luke 23:47).

The question now is: What is your response?

LESSON 12

Jesus Appearing to His Disciples

Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 21-22; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7

As Jesus was dying God turned out the lights and darkness fell over the land, and heaven and earth responded to His death in no uncertain terms (lesson 11). The temple veil was torn in two from the top to the bottom, the tombs of saints were opened, and the earth shook as if it were the very voice of God (Matthew 27:51-56). To avoid violating Jewish law, Jesus' body was hastily prepared for burial and placed in the tomb of a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathaea (Matthew 27:57-60; John 19:31-42), which perfectly fulfilled Isaiah 53:9. Then on the early morning of the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead (Luke 24:1-12), and once again world history dramatically changed. Jesus was alive, and during the next forty days He appeared at least ten times to His disciples setting the stage for His ascension (Acts 1:9-11) which ultimately prepares the way for His return (lesson 13).

The post-resurrection appearances of Christ were dramatic and full of purpose as Jesus sought to fellowship with His followers and to forgive, encourage, instruct, commission and otherwise prepare them to carry on His work until the second advent. The forty days and ten appearances were critical as Jesus *"shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and*

The Heart of the Lesson

The resurrected Christ appeared to minister to His followers. Respond in faith to the ministry of the living Savior.

speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

The first appearance was to Mary Magdalene on the resurrection Sunday by the garden tomb in Jerusalem (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18). Jesus would make four more visits on that first day. *"Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils"* (Mark 16:9).

Mary Magdalene had been fully delivered by Christ (Luke 8:2), and in return she was fully devoted to Him (Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1, 9; Luke 24:10). Jesus appeared to her first because He knew that she would have no trouble believing in a living Lord, and that she would not hesitate to go and tell others. Jesus also purposed to encourage Mary, and she wisely allowed herself to be encouraged, thus setting a solid example for contemporary Christians to be encouraged by the truth that Jesus lives and that His return is imminent.

The second appearance was to the other women on Sunday in Jerusalem (Matthew 28:9-10). As they went to tell his disciples about the resurrection *"behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him"* (Matthew 28:9).

The women were last at the cross and first to see the empty tomb and the risen Lord. Due to the threat of imprisonment and execution, the men had to keep a lower profile, and that is most likely why Jesus gave them the message to meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:7, 10).

The women were urged by Jesus not to fear, but to rejoice and to share the truth of His resurrection. And so is the message today, *"Be not afraid"* (Matthew 28:10), but rejoice in and worship the risen Savior, and tell others that He lives.

The third appearance was to two rank-and-file disciples, Cleopas and another, on Sunday afternoon on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32). *"It came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them"* (Luke 24:15). Jesus *"went with them,"* and they invited Jesus to *"abide with us"* (Luke 24:29). That is a beautiful picture of Christian communion, one complete with a fellowship meal and a Bible lesson to which Cleopas and his friend responded *"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"* (Luke 24:32). When Jesus first appeared, the two were dejected pilgrims; when the story ended, they were energetic witnesses (Luke 24:33-34), for the abiding presence of Christ makes a big difference in a believer's life (John 16:5-7, 13).

The fourth appearance was to Peter on Sunday evening in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5). *"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon"* (Luke 24:34). The details of the visit are unknown, and may have even been somewhat personal between Je-

sus and Peter alone. It is known, however, that the before-and-after effect on Peter is remarkable. Before the appearance Peter was a defeated servant, and afterwards he was a highly motivated servant. Apparently Jesus forgave Peter for denying Him three times (Luke 22:60-62) and restored him to full Christian service. The restoration is reported in John 21 and evidenced by his powerful preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and by his New Testament writings (1 and 2 Peter). Isn't it good that the living Savior is also a forgiving Savior, and that in Him a repentant believer's self-respect, hope, usefulness, and effectiveness can be restored.

The fifth appearance was to the apostles, minus Judas and Thomas, on Sunday evening in the upper room in Jerusalem (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25). It was the final recorded appearance of the resurrection Sunday. *"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you"* (John 20:19).

"Peace be unto you" were the first words of Jesus to the apostles. The word *peace* conveyed the ideas of well-being and wholeness, and *unto you* meant that He suddenly appeared not for Himself but them. Jesus was no ghost, and they were not dreaming. Jesus was really present, and peace was really possible! *"Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord"* (John 20:20), and so it goes today as believers connect with Jesus through the Spirit and scriptures.

The sixth appearance was to the eleven apostles on the following Sunday night in Jerusalem with Thomas being present, and finally being convinced that Jesus was alive (John 20:24-31; 1 Corinthians 15:5). *"Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (John 20:27).

Jesus did not appear to condemn Thomas for his doubt, or even to mention Thomas' demand to touch Him in John 20:25. He did, however, appear to convince Thomas, to bring him into full belief, and to compliment anyone who believes in Him by faith (John 20:29). Always believe Jesus in all matters. It is extremely important; it is the basis of your relationship with Him!

The seventh appearance was to seven apostles by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-25). It happened sometime before the ascension and involved a miraculous catch of fish. *"Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord"* (John 21:12).

Jesus was the initiator of this fellowship. He had called the seven to salvation and service, and now He called them to an experience of communion they would never forget. Jesus told them where to catch the fish; they actually caught, counted, and cooked the fish over a

fire kindled by Jesus, and they actually shared the meal with Jesus, which moved them to a higher level of peace and rest (Matthew 11:28-30) and pictured a greater fellowship to come (Revelation 22:17).

The eighth appearance was to the apostles and more than five hundred other believers on a mountain appointed by Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; 1 Corinthians 15:6). *"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep"* (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The resurrected Lord had been seen in Jerusalem, Judea, by the Sea of Galilee, and now by a large crowd atop a Galilean mountain. One person could have been fooled, but not five hundred. He was alive, and these eyewitnesses were about to become witnesses. It was the classic "He lives; we tell" appearance. Go and tell!

The ninth appearance was to the apostles and James in Jerusalem sometime before the ascension (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:7). *"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles"* (1 Corinthians 15:7). During this visit Jesus confirmed two things: that He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies relating to the Messiah, and that they were to be witnesses. When the Holy Spirit came upon them to empower them at Pentecost, they were to begin giving first-hand information about Christ and making personal introductions of Christ to people everywhere, which is also our duty as Christian witnesses.

The tenth appearance was to the apostles on the Mount of Olives, between Jerusalem and Bethany, with the ascension and promise to return (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12). *"He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them"* (Luke 24:50). With the gracious blessing came a firm promise to return (Acts 1:11), and with that the disciples returned to Jerusalem in a spirit of joy, ready to worship, and setting on *go* for the day of Pentecost. It was a difficult time, but an exciting time, and so it is with Christians today. He lives to return!

LESSON 13

More About Jesus

1 Peter 1:13

Vacation in Branson, Missouri! Great! Let's start packing! That scenario occurred every summer when my children were preteens and teens. Early in July my wife, three children, and I would begin planning, packing, and picking up supplies for the Branson vacation. We would attend national camp (now SonQuest II) in Gary, Texas, during the last week in July, come home to wash clothes and repack, and then we were off to whatever motel had the best "family deal" on or near Highway 76 in the "Live Music Show Capital of the World." By family law the vacation could not begin until after evening worship on one Sunday, and it had to conclude before morning worship on the following Sunday. Missing church services, except for one Wednesday night, would have made the vacation null and void. But boy did we have fun on those days in between the two Sundays, and the month-long preparations — enhanced by the Branson show brochures and that year's Convention and Visitors Bureau magazine which was mailed to the house — was half the fun. Anticipating the vacation was almost as good as taking the vacation!

A period of anticipation is where believers are today in relation to the second advent of Christ. Someday, a day already known to God,

The Heart of the Lesson

More truth about Jesus is yet to be revealed. Serve Christ while anticipating the full revelation of Christ.

we will see Christ face to face (1 John 3:2). That day is as sure as this day, and that day causes this day to have far greater purpose. Just as preparing for vacation is rewarding, anticipating the complete revelation of Jesus Christ is rewarding, and that is exactly what 1 Peter 1:13 promises: *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

More About Jesus Will Be Revealed!

Notice the last clause of 1 Peter 1:13: *"For the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* The word *revelation* refers to an uncovering, unveiling, or disclosure. It refers not only to the thing or person revealed, but also to the interpretation of it, indicating that the second revealing or advent of Christ will be far more glorious than any revelation before it. Wow!

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have already given us a lot of wonderful news about Jesus. His performing of miracles, raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the hungry, teaching parables, preaching sermons, praying to the Father, predicting the future, saving the lost, suffering for the sins of humanity, speaking from the cross, and visiting His disciples after the resurrection have already thrilled us, and the best is yet to come!

John indicated that there was much more truth about Jesus to be known: *"Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name....This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen"* (John 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

Did you see the words *many other signs* and *many other things*? Those *signs* and *things*, known and unknown, are our lively hope said Peter. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,...Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:3, 5).

The fuller revelation is what we can be eagerly waiting for said Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:7, and that is also what John had in mind in 1 John 3:1-3. In verse 1 he said that Christ in our lives makes life good now. *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."* In verse 2 he said

that life is going to get better. *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."* And in verse 3 he said that this future revelation of Christ is our present motivation to be what God wants us to be. *"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."*

What we know about Jesus now is great, and what we are going to learn about Him in the future is greater!

More About Jesus Will Increase Our Appreciation for God's Grace

The middle clause of 1 Peter 1:13 reads, *"Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought."* When Jesus returns to fully reveal Himself and to make the believer's life better than ever before, it will not be because we have earned it nor because we deserve it. It will be a *grace* gift from God, one which Paul fully credited to God in 1 Corinthians 2:9. *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."*

Children do not fully understand or appreciate all that their parents do for them. However when they grow up and become parents themselves, their understanding naturally matures. It is the same way for believers and Christ. We should make a conscious, deliberate and Spirit-led attempt to acknowledge God's goodness and grace to us in the person of Christ as we understand it today — knowing that when we actually see Him and hear the whole redemption story that our appreciation will multiply many times over. On the day of the full revelation we will be able to sing "Amazing Grace" unlike we have ever sung it before!

More About Jesus Will Spur Us to Spiritual Action!

Here is the application. As the athlete trains anticipating the thrill of victory, as the bride prepares her wedding anticipating a beautiful ceremony, as the vacationer plans his trip anticipating a week full of fun, the believer serves anticipating the return of Christ and a greater revealing of Christ! Following the word *wherefore* is a short list of Christian duties.

First, *"gird up the loins of your mind"* as a runner in the days of the Bible would tie up the loose ends of his robe so that he could run fast and not trip. Jesus challenges us to prepare our minds for action. It is His all-hands-on-deck, go-to-your-battle-station battle cry. This call assures us that the struggles and efforts will be well worth

the prize of seeing Jesus at the battle's end.

Second, *"be sober."* That is, be self-controlled and focus on the things that allow you to serve God effectively and successfully. Negatively speaking, do not get so drunk on the things of the world that you stagger through life never reaching your potentials, realizing your purpose, or reaching the goal of hearing Jesus say *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21).

Third, *"hope to the end."* That is our duty. Battle well in the present, look to the future with hope, and do not lose hope that the best is yet to come.

Abraham and his descendants carried out those very orders, and were acknowledged for it in Hebrews 11, which is God's hall of faith. Notice their faithful service, undying hope, and future reward in the reading of verses 8-10, 13 and 16. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."*

Peter wanted no one to miss out on the day of Jesus' full revelation, and wanted everyone to be glad in it and to rejoice about it. Further he wanted everyone to work toward the day of that revelation. His first intent was for everyone to be saved, and the second was for everyone who is saved to serve. Let that be the course of your life, and let more about Jesus be your motivation!

"That I may know him" (Philippians 3:10).

The theme of this Christian Living book is getting to know Jesus better. Dr. Charles R. Swindoll has written a book, *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All,* that would be excellent supplemental reading for both teacher and students. Refreshingly honest and deep, this in-depth profile from Dr. Swindoll reveals Jesus with great clarity.

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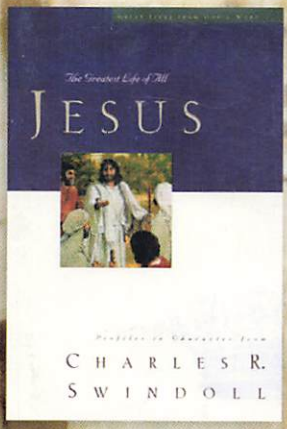

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